

April 23, 2013

The Honorable Greg Walden
Chairman
Subcommittee on Communications and
Technology
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Anna Eshoo
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Communications and
Technology
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: OUR STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE LIFELINE PROGRAM

Dear Chairman Walden and Congresswoman Eshoo,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we are writing in advance of the hearing scheduled for April 25, 2013, to express our strong support for the Universal Service Fund's (USF) wireless Lifeline program. The policy of universal service has been part of the Communications Act since 1934 because it is in our society's best interest to empower everyone to connect by telephone. Without a telephone, our most vulnerable populations would not have the ability to call 911, contact prospective and current employers, connect with health, social, and educational services, or keep in touch with family and friends. There are currently as many as 16 million low-income households who, without the Lifeline benefits, would have to choose between food on the table and the telephone connection.

Created in 1984 under President Reagan, the Lifeline program supports low-income people's access to telephone service, whether they use either wireless or traditional technology. The Lifeline program reaches individuals who are at, or below, 135 percent of the federal poverty guideline, or who participate in a qualifying state, federal or Tribal assistance program including Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps), Section 8, LIHEAP, and the Free Lunch Program. It offers \$9.25 per month to carriers to subsidize the cost of providing telephone service. In some cases, telephone companies are able to use the federal benefit to offer telephone services to consumers at no cost.

One participating servicer estimates that more than 80 percent of Lifeline subscribers in 2011 had an average household income below \$15,000; that the average age was 51; and that more than 45 percent of Lifeline subscribers were Caucasian compared to 40 percent who were African American and 7 percent who were Hispanic; the vast majority were women. For more than half of those customers, the Lifeline phone was their first wireless phone.

The Federal Communications Commission has recently taken action to curb previous abuses. We believe that the Commission should take time to evaluate its recent reforms to ensure that they are not inadvertently driving eligible households from the program.

Lifeline has proven its effectiveness. The percentage of low-income households with phone service has increased from 80 percent in 1985, when Lifeline began, to nearly 92 percent in 2011. We encourage the subcommittee to support the program and to ensure it is updated to new

technologies. If we can be of further assistance to you, or if you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact us through Hilary Shelton at the NAACP at 202-463-2940.

Sincerely,

NAACP

Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund

United Church of Christ, Office of Communication, Inc.

National Organization for Women

Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

ACLU

Asian American Justice Center, Member Asian American Center for Advancing Justice

CWA